DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 364 580 TM 020 805

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TITLE Content Analysis of the Ph.D vs. Ed.D. Dissertation.
PUB DATE [91]
NOTE 11p.
PUB TYPE Reports - Research/Technical (143)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS Abstracts; *Administration; Comparative Analysis; *Content Analysis; Doctoral Degrees; *Doctoral Dissertations; Educational Practices; Generalization; Graduate Study; Higher Education; Multivariate Analysis; Research Methodology; *Research Reports; Sampling; Statistical Data; Surveys
IDENTIFIERS Dissertation Abstracts International Index; *Doctor of Education Degrees; *Doctor of Philosophy in Education Degrees

ABSTRACT

Typically, the Ph.D. degree is said to be more research-oriented, whereas the Ed.D. degree is aimed more at the educational practitioner. The two degrees were compared with regard to research design, statistics, target populations for inference of findings, and other characteristics. A sample of 1,007 Ph.D. and 960 Ed.D dissertations was selected from "Dissertation Abstracts International" from 1950-90. It was found that the percentage of Ph.D. dissertations is increasing and is higher for women. The Ph.D. dissertation uses more multivariate statistics and has wider generalizability, and is also more prevalent in certain majors. The Ed.D. dissertation does more survey research and is most prevalent in administration. No differences were found in basic versus applied science, or in the significance of findings. (Contains 6 references.) (Author/SLD)

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ED 364 580

# Content Analysis of the Ph.D. vs. Ed.D. Dissertation

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Running head: Ph.D. vs. Ed.D.

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# Content Analysis of the Ph.D. vs. Ed.D. Dissertation

## Abstract

Typically, the Ph.D. degree is said to be more research-oriented, whereas the Ed.D. is aimed more at the educational practitioner. We compared the two degrees as to research design, statistics, target populations for inference of findings, and other characteristics. A sample of 1,007 Ph.D. and 960 Ed.D. dissertations were selected from Dissertation Abstracts International from 1950-1990. We found that the percentage of Ph.D. dissertations: is increasing; is higher for women; uses more multivariate statistics; has wider generalizability; and is more prevalent in certain majors. The Ed.D. does more survey research and is most prevalent in administration. No differences were found in basic vs. applied or significance of findings.

**Content Analysis of the Ph.D. vs. Ed.D. Dissertation**

The Ph.D. degree in the United States was patterned after the German university model. Although the early programs were rather disjointed, there was an increased emphasis on advanced and original research in the late 1800's. The first doctoral dissertaion was written at Yale University in 1861 (Malone, 1981). The first Ed.D. degree was granted at Harvard University in 1920 in response to an expressed need for more practitioners possessing the doctorate. The original intent was to create a practioner's certificate (Mayhew & Ford, 1974).

This sparked much controversy as to whether doctoral studies should be for professional training as well as for the preparation of independent researchers. The Ph.D. had long been considered to be for scholars who wished to specialize in some phase of the arts and sciences and for the advancement of research (Brubacher & Rudy, 1968).

In the 1950's, criticism of the doctor of education degree increased. Education was viewed as possessing three major factors that precluded its' unreserved acceptance into universities' graduate schools: (a) the concept of teacher preparation as training; (b) the unacceptability of professional study within the graduate school; and (c) the lack of a clearly defined body of knowledge worthy of graduate pursuits.

In light of the controversy over the credibility of the doctor of education degree in a university's graduate school,

many institutions opted to offer the Ed.D. outside of the graduate school or college, as a means of avoiding the too literal applicaton of the traditional graduate school standards. Thus, the degree was commonly offered within schools of education instead of the graduate school.

Consequently, there has always been a theoretical distinction between the Ph.D. and Ed.D. degree in that the Ph.D. is considered to be heavily research-oriented, whereas the Ed.D. is aimed more at the educational practitioner. The Ed.D. program was conceived of as "equal in rigor but different in substance" from the Ph.D. (Mayhew & Ford, 1974 p. 163). In actual practice, the distinction in program and type of dissertation has not always been clear. In 1971, a national survey sponsored by Phi Delta Kappa and the American Association of Colleges for Teacher Education showed evidence pointing to the growing similarity between the two programs (Robertson & Sistler, 1971). For years, one of the main distinctions was the foreign language requirement for the Ph.D., and many students chose to pursue the Ed.D. because of that requirement. However, by the late 1960's the foreign language requirement began to be reduced from two to one language. Subsequently, the entire language requirement began to be waived in favor of statistics and computer competencies.

Throughout the history of the Ed.D., university administrations, faculty and student alike have regarded the degree as being inferior to the Ph.D. in terms of prestige

(Spurr, 1970). The results of the PDK/AACTE study indicated that many Ph.D. programs were indeed Ed.D. programs in everything but title. It was recommended that universities offering both degrees should delineate the differences more precisely, and if the differences are minor, a case may well be made for the elimination of differing titles and the establishment of one degree (Robertson, & Sistler, 1971). Although some universities have eliminated one of the degrees (usually the Ed.D.), many universities continue to offer both degrees, which would seem to indicate that there are programmatic and research differences between the Ph.D. and the Ed.D degrees. In this study, we attempted to determine whether there were differences with regard to the research aspect of the two degrees.

Since dissertations can be seen as reflecting the most current emphases in a research area, we sought to compare Ph.D. and Ed.D. dissertations written over the past 40 years with regard to type of research (basic vs. applied), research design, statistical analyses used, significance of results, the target populations for the research findings, age of subjects used, and gender of the author in various areas of concentration.

## Method

A total of 10,614 dissertations were published in Dissertation Abstracts International in the years 1950, 1960, 1970, 1980, and 1990 in the following areas of concentration: educational administration, guidance and counseling, higher

education, history, physical education, educational psychology and teacher training. A randomized systematic sampling of 1,967 dissertations were selected for content analysis.

Other authors (e.g., McCurdy & Cleary, 1984) have reported near-perfect agreement between content analysis of dissertation abstracts and analysis of the total studies. In this study, we established interrater (95%) and intrarater (95%) reliability through percentage of agreement in coding the various study characteristics.

## Results and Discussion

The sampling resulted in identical percentages for type of degree (51% Ph.D., 49% Ed.D.) and gender (67% male, 33% female) as in the total number of dissertations over all years and areas of concentration.

The relative percentage of Ph.D. degrees has increased steadily over the years, from 23% of the dissertations reported in 1950 to 56% in 1990. Ed.D. dissertations have decreased most noticeably in the past 20 years, from over half (53%) in 1970 to 44% in 1990. The Ed.D. has been the prevalent degree for educational administration over all time intervals. Similarly, the Ph.D. has always been the most common degree in counseling, higher education, history and educational psychology.

### Gender Differences

Over all time intervals, two-thirds of the dissertations have been by men. However, the relative percentages of men and

women recipients reveal a steady change through the years. Clearly, the number of dissertations (in Dissertation Abstracts International) by women has increased drammatically, from none published in 1950 to 49% in 1990. In fact, in 1990, over half of the dissertations in four of the seven areas covered in this study were by women.

A chi-square analysis of type of degree by gender showed a significantly higher proportion of the women (55%) have sought the Ph.D. than of the men (49%), $(1, N=1,967) = 5.79$, $p < .05$. Thus the trend toward increasing percentages of students seeking the Ph.D. is explained in part by the increasing numbers of women seeking the doctorate and choosing the Ph.D.

Type of Research (Basic vs. Applied)

Research in education has always been primarily applied, i.e., aimed at solving problems in the profession. This statement is reinforced by our data in which 88% of the dissertations were classified as applied. This proportion has been constant over the years, and the percentages were exactly the same for each degree (88% applied, 12% basic).

Research Design and Statistical Analysis

Research design was classified under seven categories: descriptive, experimental, correlational, analytical, qualitative, program evaluation and historical. A significant difference in design by degree was found, $(6, N=1,967) = 46.02$, $p < .01$. The main difference was in the greater reliance on

descriptive research (primarily the survey) for the Ed.D. (42% of all Ed.Dl studies). No differences were found between degrees on percentages of experimental research.

A significant difference was found for statistical analyses, (5, N=1,967) = 71.04, p <.01. The major source of differences was in the use of simple frequencies and percentages by the Ed.D. (reflecting the greater use of surveys) and a higher percentage of multivariate statistics in Ph.D. dissertations. Unexpectedly, there was not a pronounced increase in the use of multivariate statistics over the years.

Significance of Results and Target Populations

No difference was found in the incidence of significant findings. Mostly significant results were seen in 71% of the Ph.D. and 67% of the Ed.D. dissertations.

A highly significant difference was found in the target populations for the research findings for the two degrees, (2, N=1,967) = 50.99, p <.01. In 71% of the Ph.D. studies, results were inferred to national or international populations or settings, whereas in 42% of the Ed.D. studies, the results pertained to the local level, such as an institution, a state, or region.

Conclusion

Differences do exist between the Ph.D. and Ed.D. dissertation in certain research characteristics, most notably in research design, statistical analyses and target populations. It

appears that although the percentage of Ph.D. degrees is increasing, the nature of the Ed.D. continues to be more oriented to professional practice than the Ph.D.

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